INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMALE AGENCY: NAVIGATING CULTURAL DICHOTOMIES IN THREE DAUGHTERS OF EVE BY ELIF SHAFAK

BY TEHREEM FATIMA

SESSION (2021-2025)

Department of English Language and literature Literature

Govt. Graduate College, Mandi Bahauddin

University of Punjab, Lahore

MAY, 2025

INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMALE AGENCY: NAVIGATING CULTURAL DICHOTOMIES IN THREE DAUGHTERS OF EVE BY ELIF SHAFAK

BY TEHREEM FATIMA

University Roll No: 065062

Session: 2021-2025

Written in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor studies in English Literature.

Supervisor Prof. Sajid Mehmood

Department of English Literature and Language

Govt. Graduate College, Mandi Bahauddin

University of Punjab

MAY, 2025

CERTIFICATE

Dissertation title: **"INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMALE AGENCY: NAVIGATING CULTURL DICHOTOMIES IN THREE DAUGHTERS OF EVE BY ELIF SHAFAK"**

Supervised by: **Prof. Sajid Mehmood**

Submitted by: **Tehreem Fatima**

This dissertation is accepted by the name of the Department of English, University of Punjab in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Bachelor's Studies in English Literature.

Internal Examiner (Supervisor): _____

External Examiner: _____

Head of the Department: _____

Name of the Institute: Govt. Graduate College Mandi Bahauddin

Dated _____ _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am profoundly grateful to **Allah Almighty**, whose infinite mercy, guidance, and blessings have illuminated my path throughout this journey. Without His will, nothing would have been possible. I extend my deepest love and gratitude to my **Ami and Abu**, whose endless prayers, unwavering faith, and constant encouragement have been my greatest strength. Their sacrifices and support have shaped the foundation of my academic and personal growth. To my **Siblings**, thank you for being my pillars of joy and motivation during moments of exhaustion and doubt. Your belief in me carried me forward. I am sincerely thankful to my supervisor, **Prof. Sajid Mehmood**, for his valuable guidance, insightful feedback, and continuous support throughout this research. His mentorship not only enhanced the quality of my work but also inspired me intellectually. To everyone who stood beside me in this journey—your presence made the destination even more meaningful.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents, Ami and Abu, whose unwavering support, endless prayers, and unconditional love have been the foundation of my journey. Your guidance and sacrifices have shaped my path, and every achievement I've earned is a reflection of your faith in me. Thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself.

I also dedicate this work to myself—to the determination that kept me going through long nights and early mornings, to the discipline that carried me past exhaustion, and to the quiet strength I discovered within.

May this thesis stand as a testament to the love that raised me and the effort that shaped me—born from weary nights, lit by early dawns, and carried forward by the quiet fire of belief.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT……..vii

INTRODUCTION…….1

Background of the Study……..1

Statement of the Problem…….4

Research Questions……5

Research Objectives…….…..5

Significance of the Study……..….5.

Chapterization……6

LITERATURE REVIEW……..8

Textual Review……9

Theoretical Review…….11

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY…….16

Research Design…….17

Theoretical Framework……..…18

DATA ANALYSIS……..21

Textual Analysis……..23

CONCLUSION…….41

Recommendations……44

WORKS CITED……..47

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of female agency at the intersection of gender, religion, and culture in Elif Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve*. Through an in-depth analysis of the characters Peri, Mona, and Shirin, the study investigates how Muslim women navigate cultural dichotomies between East and West, tradition and modernity, belief and doubt. The narrative offers a nuanced portrayal of diverse womanhoods shaped by conflicting ideologies and social expectations. By applying Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality as the central theoretical framework, this research highlights the overlapping systems of power—such as patriarchy, religious doctrine, and class structures—that influence female identity and autonomy. The textual analysis reveals how Shafak's characters embody resistance, confusion, and self-definition within these layered frameworks, ultimately illustrating how female subjectivity is neither fixed nor monolithic but continuously shaped by social, political, and personal forces. The thesis not only contributes to the existing discourse on Muslim feminism and cultural hybridity but also underscores the significance of intersectional readings in unpacking complex identities in contemporary literature

Key words: *Intersectionality, Female agency, Cultural dichotomies, Identity ,Religion ,Gender ,Autonomy*

CHAPTER NO 1

INTRODUCTION

In a world increasingly defined by cultural intersections and ideological conflicts, literature serves as a vital medium to explore and question the complexities of identity, belief, and agency. Elif Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve* offers a compelling narrative that delves into the intricacies of female experience caught between multiple, often conflicting, cultural frameworks. This thesis investigates how Shafak's female characters navigate the cultural dichotomies of East and West, tradition and modernity, faith and skepticism, through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality. By foregrounding the overlapping dimensions of gender, religion, class, and culture, the study illuminates the multifaceted realities of Muslim women's agency in contemporary literature.

Elif Shafak, a leading figure in contemporary Turkish literature, is known for her nuanced portrayals of identity, belonging, and the tensions between heritage and progress. Her bicultural upbringing—born in France and raised in Turkey—imbues her works with a unique perspective on cultural hybridity. Writing in both Turkish and English, Shafak's narratives bridge East and West, tradition and modernity, often foregrounding female subjectivity and empowerment. *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) continues this thematic engagement by chronicling the ideological and emotional journey of Peri, a Muslim woman negotiating her place within complex social and religious landscapes.

1.1 Background of the Study:

Understanding the position of women in culturally complex and often patriarchal societies requires more than a single-angle perspective. Women's identities are shaped by various overlapping factors such as gender, religion, class, ethnicity, and culture. These layers of identity do not exist separately—they intersect, creating unique experiences of both marginalization and resistance. To examine these complexities, this thesis uses the theory of *intersectionality*, first introduced by legal scholar **Kimberlé Crenshaw** in 1989.

Crenshaw developed the concept to highlight how traditional feminist and civil rights approaches often failed to address the specific experiences of Black women. Over time, intersectionality has become a global framework for exploring how systems of power and identity interact. In the context of this study, it is a valuable lens for examining female agency in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*, where characters face tension between secular and religious values, tradition and modernity, and Eastern and Western worldviews.

The reason for selecting intersectionality as the theoretical foundation is its ability to explore the multidimensional nature of women's lives. It allows us to move beyond limited portrayals of women as either oppressed or liberated and instead see how they actively navigate their realities—sometimes resisting, sometimes adapting, but always responding to the social and cultural forces around them.

Historically, in countries like Turkey, the roles of women have been shaped by major ideological shifts. During the early 20th century, with the founding of the Turkish Republic, state-led modernization aimed to create a secular, Westernized image of the "modern Turkish woman." However, this image often came with contradictions, as patriarchal norms remained deeply embedded in society. In more

recent decades, the rise of political Islam has reintroduced more conservative gender roles, placing many women in the difficult position of having to choose—or appear to choose—between opposing value systems.

In today's world, these cultural divisions have not disappeared; instead, they've become even more pronounced. Globalization, migration, and identity politics have created new spaces where traditional values clash with modern ideologies. Women are often at the center of this clash, navigating expectations from family, society, and themselves. This is especially true in Turkey, which lies at the crossroads of East and West—both geographically and culturally. These ongoing tensions make Turkey a particularly rich site for exploring themes of identity, belief, and autonomy.

Elif Shafak, a Turkish-British author known for addressing issues of gender, identity, and cultural conflict, brings these themes to life in *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). The novel centers on Peri, a woman reflecting on her past while attending a dinner party in Istanbul. Through flashbacks, readers see her inner conflict as she grows up caught between her secular father and devout mother. At Oxford University, she becomes friends with two other women—Shirin, who rejects religion entirely, and Mona, a devout Muslim feminist. Each character represents a different response to the cultural and ideological expectations placed on women.

Together, the three women form a symbolic triangle: the sinner, the believer, and the confused. Their friendship and conflicts highlight the emotional and intellectual struggles many women face when trying to find their place in a divided world. Through these characters, Shafak does not offer easy answers but instead opens up space for complex, personal explorations of belief, identity, and freedom.

This thesis will explore how Shafak uses these characters to examine the multiple identities that shape women's lives and how they assert—or are denied—agency in different contexts. By applying intersectionality as the main analytical framework, the study will show how *Three Daughters of Eve* challenges simplistic portrayals of Muslim women and offers a more layered, realistic view of what it means to be a woman navigating between cultures, ideologies, and expectations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

In many literary and media portrayals, Muslim women are often reduced to binary roles: either as oppressed by tradition or as liberated by Western ideals. These oversimplified representations fail to reflect the complex identities of women who live at the crossroads of religion, gender, culture, and class. Particularly in countries like Turkey, where secular and religious ideologies coexist and compete, women's experiences are shaped by layered and often conflicting cultural forces.

This limited portrayal is not just a narrative issue—it reflects a broader gap in literary scholarship. Despite growing interest in gender studies, there is a lack of intersectional analysis applied to Muslim female characters in modern fiction. Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* offers a rich, character-driven story that highlights these tensions, yet has not been sufficiently explored through the lens of intersectionality.

This thesis addresses that gap. By applying Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, the research will examine how Shafak's characters navigate overlapping identities and social expectations. The study aims to highlight how these intersections influence female agency, offering a more nuanced understanding of how women shape and redefine themselves within culturally divided spaces.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. How does *Three Daughters of Eve* depict the intersection of gender, religion, and culture in the lives of its female characters?

2. In what ways do the characters navigate and assert agency within the cultural dichotomies of East and West, tradition and modernity?

3. How does the application of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality deepen our understanding of the characters' identities and experiences?

1.4 Research Objectives:

To analyze how gender, religion, and cultural identity intersect in the portrayal of female characters in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*.

To examine the different ways female characters negotiate their agency within conflicting ideological and cultural frameworks.

To apply Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory as a lens for interpreting the complex identities and struggles of women in the novel.

1.5 Significance of the study:

In a world where identity is increasingly shaped by overlapping social, cultural, and ideological forces, the voices of women who stand at the crossroads of these intersections remain underrepresented—especially in literature. This study seeks to fill that void by examining how Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* captures the complexity of female identity in a society split between secularism and religious tradition, East and West, modernity and heritage.

By using Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, this research explores how gender, faith, class, and cultural expectations interact to shape the agency of the novel's female characters. Unlike conventional portrayals that reduce Muslim women to either oppressed or liberated figures, this study highlights how women in the novel resist, adapt, and redefine their roles within conflicting frameworks.

The study is significant not only for its literary insight but for its broader cultural relevance. It contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Muslim female identity, challenges dominant narratives, and brings intersectional theory into conversation with contemporary fiction. Ultimately, it aims to broaden the scope of feminist literary discourse and affirm the importance of complexity in the portrayal of women navigating divided cultural landscapes.

1.6 Chapterization:

First chapter outlines the background, research questions, objectives, significance, and theoretical grounding of the study.

Second chapter reviews existing scholarship related to intersectionality, female agency, cultural dichotomies, and Elif Shafak's work.

Third chapter details the qualitative method and theoretical approach used to analyze *Three Daughters of Eve* through an intersectional lens.

Fourth chapter presents a critical analysis of the novel, focusing on character experiences and thematic elements related to identity and agency.

Fifth chapter summarizes key findings, reflects on the implications of the study, and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER NO 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction:

Conducting a literature review constitutes a vital component of academic investigation, as it allows the researcher to position their study within the framework of established scholarship and current intellectual discourse. A comprehensive engagement with a literary text requires not only a close inspection of its predominant themes and socio-cultural backdrop but also an appreciation of the theoretical lenses through which it can be interpreted. This chapter delivers an in-depth analysis of the literary and theoretical foundations that shape this research, with Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* serving as the central text. The novel intricately explores the convergence of belief systems, womanhood, and personal identity amid opposing cultural narratives.

This chapter is structured around three core sections. The first offers a contextual and evaluative account of Shafak's literary canon, particularly concentrating on academic critiques of *Three Daughters of Eve* that underscore gender relations, spiritual ambivalence, and cultural friction. The second section introduces the theoretical underpinning that guides this thesis—Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality—which acts as the principal analytical tool for textual examination. The final section synthesizes the insights drawn from both literary analysis and theoretical discourse, providing a unified base for the interpretive chapters that follow.

2.2 Textual Review:

Elif Shafak, a leading figure in modern Turkish literature, is widely acknowledged for her dynamic narratives that explore identity, gender, religion, and cultural confrontation. Born in France and brought up in Turkey, Shafak's bicultural background profoundly shapes her storytelling, allowing her to navigate both Eastern and Western worldviews with fluidity. Writing in both Turkish and English, she often constructs bridges between tradition and modernity. Among her well-known novels are **The Bastard of Istanbul**, **The Forty Rules of Love**, and **Honour**, all of which critically engage with themes of social constraints, spiritual discovery, and gendered realities. Her 2016 novel *Three Daughters of Eve* continues this engagement by tracing the ideological and emotional evolution of a Muslim woman grappling with conflicting belief systems and cultural expectations in both Istanbul and Oxford.

Scholars have engaged with *Three Daughters of Eve* through diverse critical frameworks, contributing to a growing body of academic discourse around the novel. In their feminist-psychoanalytical investigation titled "Construction of Womanhood, Gender-Based Violence and Patriarchal Intersections in Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*", Aisha Akram and Muhammad Usama Siddique examine the manifestation of patriarchal oppression and its impact on female subjectivity. Their study highlights how the protagonist's identity is molded within a framework of gendered violence and societal marginalization.

Likewise, Naveed ur Rehman, Manaf Ali Shah, and Aziz Ullah Khan in "*Eve Between East and West*" offer a psychoanalytical perspective, delving into the character's inner conflict between tradition and modernity. They argue that Peri, the

protagonist, embodies the psychological struggle of navigating two opposing cultures, which in turn shapes her moral and emotional consciousness.

In another significant study, Shuaa S. Al-Zahrani and Laila M. Al-Sharqi, through “Prismatic Identities or Authentic Selves?”, approach the novel using an intersectional feminist lens. Their analysis underscores how gender, faith, and societal roles interlace to create layered female identities. They contend that Shafak doesn’t merely showcase cultural dichotomies, but also probes the notion of "authenticity" in an increasingly globalized, hybrid world.

Varde Hirenkumar Balvantbhai’s paper “Elif Shafak’s '*Three Daughters of Eve*': Allegory of Identities and Authentic Selves” emphasizes how the novel allegorically addresses identity fragmentation and cultural alienation. He points out that Shafak challenges stereotypical depictions of Muslim women and offers a more multifaceted, introspective portrayal of their struggles and aspirations within conflicting ideological structures.

Additionally, Rabieah Tahir, Iqra Jabeen, and Ayesha Izhar Chaudhri in “Existential Threads in Shafak's *'Three Daughters of Eve’*: A Critical Reading” explore existential dilemmas faced by the protagonist. Their research interprets Peri’s spiritual and intellectual crises as a reflection of broader issues of identity, estrangement, and inner turmoil, thus framing the novel as an inquiry into selfhood and purpose.

While these academic contributions illuminate various dimensions of the novel, certain areas remain insufficiently explored. For instance, although elements of intersectionality are

2.3 Theoretical Review:

I acknowledged, a thorough application of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory—which examines how multiple social categories intersect to shape lived experiences—has been largely absent. Most analyses focus on singular aspects such as trauma, religion, or gender, without fully exploring their interconnection. Furthermore, the notion of female autonomy in morally complex and multicultural settings remains underdeveloped in current literature. This thesis seeks to address these omissions by applying Crenshaw's intersectional framework to analyze how Shafak's narrative enables female agency through the confluence of faith, class, gender, and sociocultural identity.

This investigation is rooted in the theoretical construct of **Intersectionality**, a paradigm initially articulated by legal theorist *Kimberlé Crenshaw* in the late 1980s. Developed within the intellectual tradition of Critical Race Theory, Crenshaw's insight arose from her observation that analyzing oppression through isolated dimensions—such as gender or race—fails to fully encapsulate the intricate interplay of marginalization. Her seminal essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989), critiqued the tendency of both legal practices and feminist narratives to exclude the compounded struggles faced by Black women, effectively rendering their unique experiences invisible within mainstream discourse.

At its essence, Intersectionality posits that identity is not monolithic but rather multi-layered and overlapping, shaped by converging systems of inequality—such as patriarchy, racism, religious orthodoxy, and socio-economic disparity—which function concurrently. This framework was further enriched by scholars like *Patricia Hill Collins,* whose theory of the "matrix of domination" in elucidates how multiple

axes of power intersect to uphold systemic hierarchies. Consequently, Intersectionality serves both as a diagnostic tool and a critical lens for investigating the dynamics of identity formation and sociocultural subjugation.

In contrast to Crenshaw's focus on structural marginalization, *Judith Butler*, a key figure in feminist and queer theory, advanced a distinct interpretation of identity through her concept of performativity. While Crenshaw emphasizes the material consequences of intersecting social locations, Butler theorizes that identity is not a stable entity but rather constructed through *repetitive acts* and social performances. Though both thinkers interrogate fixed notions of identity, their approaches diverge: Crenshaw reveals how multiple structures of oppression simultaneously constrain individuals, whereas Butler interrogates the fluidity and social construction of identity itself. This thesis privileges Crenshaw's model for its pragmatic applicability in analyzing how interwoven dimensions of faith, gender, class, and cultural location converge in *Three Daughters of Eve*.

In literary scholarship, Intersectionality has emerged as a potent analytical instrument for dissecting how characters are situated within intersecting power networks. Academics have applied the framework to examine the entanglement of racial trauma and femininity in Toni Morrison's **Beloved** and to explore diasporic consciousness and gendered experiences in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's **Americanah**. Such studies illustrate how fictional narratives reflect the convergence of identity markers—ethnicity, gender, nationhood, and class—revealing a more nuanced understanding of character development and sociopolitical context.

Applying this conceptual framework to Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* allows for a deeper reading of its central figure, **Peri**, whose lived reality is shaped by

a constant negotiation of cultural and ideological oppositions—between belief and skepticism, East and West, tradition and modernity. Her personal narrative is molded not only by her gender but also by her upbringing in a religiously conservative, middle-class Turkish household and her exposure to elite Western education at Oxford. Intersectionality brings to light how her psychological unrest and social dissonance are products of larger systemic forces acting simultaneously upon her identity.

Additionally, the narrative's symbolic trinity—**Mona** (the Believer), **Shirin** (the Sinner), and **Peri** (the Conflicted)—acts as an allegorical structure that examines the spectrum of womanhood shaped by diverging religious, secular, and philosophical standpoints. Mona's Islamic veil, for instance, is more than a personal expression of faith; it serves as a site of cultural negotiation within a Western context. Shirin's embrace of secularism and liberal values becomes a form of resistance to patriarchal orthodoxy, while Peri's wavering position illustrates the emotional and ideological disarray often experienced by individuals straddling multiple cultural affiliations. Intersectionality enables a reading that moves beyond binary categorizations to reveal how these characters' identities are influenced, enabled, or restricted by the interplay of their socio-political positions.

Viewed through this theoretical prism, the novel transcends the boundaries of a personal coming-of-age tale and becomes a profound exploration of identity politics, selfhood, and female empowerment. Intersectionality exposes the intricacies through which Shafak's female characters confront, comply with, or contest the normative structures that seek to define them. It sheds light on how womanhood is continually reconstructed at the junction of faith, gender, class, and tradition.

Ultimately, Intersectionality offers a compelling foundation for interpreting *Three Daughters of Eve* as a literary narrative that interrogates rigid identity frameworks and highlights the complex, intersecting forces that shape the female experience in contemporary, transnational societies. By employing this lens, the thesis aims to uncover how Shafak's characters not only reflect but also resist the dominant ideologies that attempt to constrain their autonomy and self-expression.

Conclusion

A thorough exploration of the literary and theoretical dimensions surrounding *Three Daughters of Eve* affirms that Elif Shafak's narrative operates at the intersection of cultural, ideological, and gendered complexities. Her work does more than chronicle a woman's journey through faith and identity; it interrogates reductive representations of Muslim womanhood as seen through both Eastern and Western lenses. Through her broader literary repertoire—including *The Bastard of Istanbul, The Forty Rules of Love, and Honour*—Shafak persistently engages with themes of patriarchal constraint, traditional values, and the pursuit of self-liberation, with *Three Daughters of Eve* emerging as a particularly focused meditation on these tensions.

The academic contributions of scholars such as Aisha Akram, Muhammad Usama Siddique, Naveed ur Rehman, Shuaa Al-Zahrani, and others have significantly enriched scholarly discourse surrounding the novel. Their analyses highlight critical aspects such as structural gender-based violence, the ideological East-West divide, fractured identities, and spiritual ambivalence. Nonetheless, these discussions also underscore certain limitations—most notably, an insufficient engagement with intersectionality as a comprehensive theoretical approach. Much of the existing

criticism isolates identity markers rather than investigating their interdependent and intersecting roles in shaping female subjectivity.

The theoretical framework of this chapter established Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality as a compelling and nuanced tool for interpreting the protagonist's multifaceted experiences. Crenshaw's paradigm facilitates a deeper understanding of how overlapping systems of oppression—such as gender, religious doctrine, cultural expectations, and socioeconomic status—converge to construct the lived realities of marginalized individuals. Applied to Shafak's work, this lens allows for a more integrated and layered examination of Peri's internal conflicts and external positioning.

Taken together, this chapter has mapped the scholarly landscape while also identifying critical voids and new interpretive opportunities. By grounding the present thesis in an intersectional framework, the subsequent analysis will endeavor to extend the conversation around *Three Daughters of Eve*, offering a more nuanced inquiry into how intersecting social dynamics shape female identity and autonomy within the context of contemporary Muslim society.

CHAPTER NO 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter delineates the methodological and theoretical structure that underpins this investigation, which critically engages with Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* through the prism of intersectional feminism. Shafak, renowned for her narratives that interrogate the interplay between East and West, tradition and progressivism, and belief and skepticism, offers a literary canvas rich with socio-political and cultural nuance. This particular novel, with its nuanced portrayal of Muslim femininity, ideological fragmentation, and identity construction, holds significant pertinence in the contemporary global landscape where binary constructs are increasingly contested and redefined.

Analyzing such a layered narrative demands a research design that transcends surface-level interpretation; it calls for a robust qualitative and interpretive methodology that can effectively examine the interwoven dimensions of power, identity, and social positioning present within the story. This study, therefore, adopts a qualitative textual analysis to investigate how intersecting identity markers—such as gender, socio-economic status, religious belief, and cultural heritage—interact to influence the lived experiences of the female characters, with a primary focus on the protagonist, Peri. The narrative unfolds between the contrasting settings of Istanbul and Oxford, infusing the discussion with a transnational perspective on identity and autonomy.

The theoretical orientation of this research is anchored in Kimberlé Crenshaw's formulation of intersectionality, a paradigm that underscores the entwined nature of social categories and the compounded forms of marginalization and privilege they engender. Utilizing this conceptual apparatus allows for a more textured reading of how socio-cultural dynamics shape the characters' internal struggles and their navigation of the external world.

This chapter is organized into three core components. The first elaborates on the research methodology employed in the study, presenting a rationale for the choice of qualitative analysis and clarifying the interpretive strategies implemented. The second section explicates the theoretical lens, offering a critical overview of intersectionality's foundational concepts and scholarly trajectory. The final part synthesizes the methodological and theoretical approaches, establishing a coherent platform for the interpretive chapters that follow.

3.1 Research Design:

This study adopts a qualitative research design, rooted in interpretive methodologies that prioritize depth over breadth. The choice of qualitative inquiry aligns with the research aim: to explore how Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* articulates female agency within the intersectional frameworks of faith, gender, class, and cultural identity. Rather than seeking measurable outcomes or statistical generalizations, this approach emphasizes contextual interpretation and the subjective meanings embedded within the literary text. The primary source material comprises the novel itself, which is analyzed through close reading and thematic deconstruction. Supplementary scholarly articles, critical essays, and theoretical writings are used as secondary sources to support and deepen the analysis. Data collection involves textual extraction

of key dialogues, narrative structures, character developments, and symbolic elements, all of which are scrutinized for their relevance to intersectional themes. The analytical method centers on textual analysis through the lens of intersectionality theory, particularly Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, to identify how overlapping structures of oppression—such as patriarchy, religious conservatism, and socio-economic stratification—are portrayed. The rationale for this methodology is grounded in the interpretative nature of literary studies, where meaning is not fixed but negotiated through layered readings. Employing this flexible yet rigorous framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of the protagonist's multidimensional identity, making it especially suitable for assessing complex themes like cultural hybridity, spiritual ambiguity, and gendered resistance within a contemporary Muslim narrative. Ultimately, this methodological orientation ensures that the inquiry remains attuned to both the narrative intricacies of the novel and the broader theoretical discourse surrounding intersectionality and feminist literary criticism.

3.2 Theoretical Framework:

The present study is underpinned by the theoretical paradigm of Intersectionality, a concept that originated in the late 1980s through the pioneering work of legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. First articulated in her influential paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989), Crenshaw developed this framework to critique the limitations of identity politics and to expose how systems of oppression do not act independently but are interrelated and interdependent. Initially formulated within the context of Black feminist legal theory, Intersectionality emerged as a response to the erasure of Black women's experiences in both feminist and antiracist discourses.

Crenshaw argued that women of color are often situated within overlapping and conflicting power structures, such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of structural inequality, that are inadequately addressed when these systems are examined in isolation.

Over the decades, Intersectionality has expanded beyond its initial legal and sociological domains into a versatile critical tool in cultural studies, gender theory, education, health research, and, significantly, literary analysis. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins extended the theory through the concept of the "matrix of domination," which underscores the interconnectedness of social categorizations and the cumulative impact of oppression on marginalized individuals. As feminist and postcolonial thought evolved, so too did the applications of Intersectionality, now employed to interrogate structures of privilege and exclusion in both historical and global contexts.

In literary scholarship, Intersectionality has become a valuable methodology for understanding the complex positionalities of characters and the societal frameworks within which narratives unfold. In works like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Intersectionality facilitates readings that expose the nuances of identity, revealing how characters navigate and resist the intersecting forces of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. The theory proves particularly salient when analyzing literature that grapples with diasporas, hybridity, cultural dislocation, and the struggle for agency.

When applied to Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*, Intersectionality reveals itself as an indispensable analytical lens for examining the multifaceted experiences of the protagonist, Peri. Her identity is shaped not just by her gender, but

also by her socio-economic background, religious ambivalence, and transnational upbringing. The ideological pull between Istanbul and Oxford—the East and the West—further compounds her existential dilemmas. These overlapping domains of influence cannot be sufficiently unpacked through a single-axis framework. Intersectionality provides the theoretical apparatus necessary to deconstruct how these dimensions interact and coalesce in shaping both Peri's consciousness and her constrained autonomy.

Furthermore, the triadic characters—Mona, Shirin, and Peri—function as symbolic representations of diverse female archetypes. Intersectionality enables a more nuanced understanding of how their respective ideological positions are not merely expressions of personal belief but are also the product of distinct socio-political and cultural configurations. Whether it's Mona's religious conviction, Shirin's secular defiance, or Peri's persistent confusion, each figure is constructed at the juncture of intersecting social forces.

In the context of contemporary global tensions surrounding identity politics, religious polarization, and feminist discourses, the relevance of Intersectionality remains undiminished. It challenges essentialist notions of identity and urges a more layered consideration of how oppression operates in modern, multicultural societies. By grounding this study in Intersectionality, the research aligns itself with a critical tradition that seeks not only to analyze literature but also to unpack the broader societal structures that inform and are reflected in it.

CHAPTER NO 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction:

As this chapter embarks on the analytical exploration of Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*, it is essential to foreground the theoretical framework that informs the interpretive lens of the study—***Intersectionality***. Although Chapter 3 provided a comprehensive grounding of this theory in terms of its historical emergence and intellectual evolution, this section briefly revisits key aspects of Intersectionality with specific focus on its practical application in literary analysis, and its capacity to interrogate layered experiences of identity, power, and agency in narrative form.

First articulated by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, Intersectionality emerged in response to the erasure of Black women's lived realities within both antiracist and feminist discourses. Crenshaw, particularly in her influential essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989), argued that frameworks that isolate gender from race—or vice versa—fail to capture the full scope of oppression experienced by women situated at the crossroads of multiple identity markers. The significance of this theory lies in its foundational argument: that systems of power do not operate in isolation. Instead, structures such as patriarchy, racism, classism, and religious hegemony intersect and interlock, producing complex modes of marginalization.

As Intersectionality developed, scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins further elaborated its scope, framing it within a broader "matrix of domination." This expanded view recognized that identities are not additive but mutually constitutive. One is not merely a woman and middle-class and Muslim and educated; rather, the meaning and impact of each identity is reshaped by its entanglement with the others. This layered approach provides a potent tool for literary analysis, allowing readers to perceive not only what a character is experiencing, but also **how** and **why** those experiences are shaped by the interwoven structures surrounding them.

In the context of contemporary literature, especially narratives that grapple with themes of migration, cultural conflict, and gendered identity, Intersectionality has become an essential interpretive strategy. Novels like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* have been fruitfully analyzed through this lens. These works showcase protagonists who are not shaped by a singular identity or form of discrimination, but by the cumulative and entangled forces of race, gender, class, sexuality, and cultural displacement. Similarly, Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* situates its central characters within overlapping social hierarchies that both restrict and redefine their agency.

Peri, the novel's protagonist, is neither wholly traditional nor fully modern; neither devoutly religious nor strictly secular. Her experiences as a woman raised in a culturally conservative Istanbul household, educated in the liberal setting of Oxford, and caught between competing ideological forces, make her a prime subject for intersectional analysis. Her internal conflict cannot be fully understood by isolating gender from class, or faith from education. Rather, it is precisely the convergence of these elements that constructs her personal dilemmas and social identity.

Moreover, the novel's secondary characters—Mona, the veiled feminist; Shirin, the secular intellectual—embody contrasting archetypes that reflect differing intersections of belief, nationality, education, and womanhood. By examining the tensions among these characters through the intersectional lens, this chapter reveals how Shafak presents no single model of "Muslim womanhood," but instead offers a spectrum of possibilities shaped by diverse socio-cultural locations.

Intersectionality is thus not merely a thematic presence in *Three Daughters of Eve*; it is a methodological necessity. It enables an analysis that resists binary thinking and challenges essentialist narratives. In a globalized, post-9/11 world, where Muslim identities are often oversimplified or stereotyped, Shafak's novel stands as a deliberate intervention—one that demands a more nuanced, layered approach to understanding female subjectivity. Intersectionality provides the tools to unpack these layers and to examine how agency, belief, and identity are produced at the intersections of competing discourses.

This chapter, therefore, employs Intersectionality not as a background concept, but as an active analytical tool. It will trace how intersecting forces—religious dogma, national identity, class privilege, educational exposure, and gendered expectations—shape the trajectories of the female characters in the novel. Through this, the study aims to illuminate how Shafak not only critiques reductive cultural binaries but also proposes a vision of womanhood that is fragmented, evolving, and deeply embedded in socio-political context.

Textual Analysis:

This study explores how *Three Daughters of Eve* portrays the intersection of gender, religion, and culture in shaping the lives and experiences of its female characters.

The analysis examines the ways in which the characters navigate and assert personal agency within the cultural dichotomies of East and West, as well as tradition and modernity.

The research investigates how the application of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality enhances our understanding of the characters' identities and lived experiences in the novel.

In *Three Daughters of Eve* , Elif Shafak intricately maps the lives of women navigating complex socio-religious terrains, offering a nuanced exploration of how gender, faith, and culture interweave to shape individual agency. The novel pivots around its protagonist, Peri, and her journey through ideological conflict and personal awakening, set against the broader backdrop of Istanbul and Oxford. Through Peri and her counterparts—Mona and Shirin—Shafak renders a literary tapestry that illuminates the intersectionality of female identity, highlighting how overlapping structures of patriarchy, religious orthodoxy, and cultural dichotomies influence and often constrain women's autonomy.

Peri, the "Confused," symbolizes the in-between space many modern Muslim women inhabit. Her characterization as one perpetually caught in ideological limbo reflects the inner dissonance experienced by those raised within conservative yet rapidly modernizing societies. She is neither overtly devout nor entirely secular, and this ambivalence becomes a narrative device through which Shafak probes the existential and social anxieties surrounding female identity. Peri's life is marked by internal conflict: "There were two Peris, like two sides of a coin, neither of which she

could suppress entirely." This duality—between her mother's religious devotion and her father's secular nationalism—frames the ideological dichotomy shaping her worldview. Her mother, Selma, embodies traditional religiosity, often using faith as a lens through which she disciplines and directs her daughter's moral compass. In contrast, her father, Mensur, champions rationalism and Western modernity, pushing Peri toward critical inquiry and skepticism. The tension between these parental poles is not merely personal but symbolic of the broader cultural schism in Turkish society—between East and West, piety and secularism.

The gendered implications of this divide are particularly salient. While Mensur's secularism is linked with paternal authority and intellectual freedom, Selma's religiosity becomes a source of moral policing, especially for her daughter. Peri's navigation through these conflicting ideologies underscores the societal expectation that women act as cultural and moral bearers, constantly negotiating between obedience and self-expression. This role is not equally imposed on men in the novel, suggesting that gender acts as the principal axis upon which cultural and religious tensions pivot. Women, especially in traditional settings, are often seen as the guardians of family honor, a trope that subjects them to stricter scrutiny and control. Peri internalizes these expectations early on, growing up with the belief that "a woman's greatest virtue was silence." This social conditioning becomes evident in her relationships—both familial and romantic—where she is continually torn between self-effacement and the pursuit of agency.

The Oxford years present Peri with a microcosm of ideological plurality. Here, she encounters two other female archetypes: Mona, the "Believer," and Shirin, the "Sinner." These characters are not merely friends but narrative foils that bring into sharper relief the contours of Peri's internal struggle. Mona, an Egyptian-American

hijabi feminist, represents the possibility of synthesizing faith and activism. She is confident in her identity, unapologetically devout yet intellectually rigorous. Mona's assertion that "there is no contradiction between Islam and feminism" challenges Western liberal presumptions that equate veiling with oppression. However, her empowerment is not without constraints. Despite her vocal stance, Mona occasionally confronts cultural stereotypes and Islamophobia, illustrating that religious women in Western societies face unique forms of marginalization.

Shirin, by contrast, embodies secular liberalism. An Iranian exile, she is vocal, irreverent, and critical of religious orthodoxy. Shirin's unapologetic stance on sexuality and gender norms defies the patriarchal expectations often imposed on Middle Eastern women. Her lifestyle and beliefs act as a counterpoint to Mona's devoutness and Peri's confusion. Yet, even Shirin is not entirely free from cultural burdens. Her rejection of religion does not shield her from the residual effects of patriarchal judgment, especially regarding her outspokenness and sexual autonomy. Shafak crafts her as someone who "believed in nothing but the self," yet that self is persistently shaped by exile, displacement, and collective memory.

Through these three women, Shafak constructs what might be considered a feminist trinity, each occupying a different ideological position along the axes of gender, religion, and culture. Together, they illustrate that female identity in Muslim contexts is far from monolithic. Instead, it is a constellation of beliefs, experiences, and resistances, shaped as much by societal expectations as by personal convictions. This triad of characters also allegorically interrogates the notion of authentic selfhood. Who gets to define a woman's truth—religion, culture, or the woman herself? And what happens when these definitions collide?

Peri's romantic entanglement with Professor Azur, an unorthodox philosopher, deepens the exploration of intersectionality. Azur encourages intellectual rebellion and spiritual questioning, embodying the liberal academic ethos that challenges fixed identities. Yet, his relationship with Peri is not devoid of gendered dynamics. Despite his progressive stance, he fails to fully understand the cultural weight Peri carries as a Muslim woman navigating multiple expectations. This reflects a broader critique of liberal academia's blind spots—its tendency to universalize experiences while ignoring the specific burdens of marginalized identities. The gendered power imbalance in their relationship is subtle but palpable, mirroring the broader asymmetries women often face in supposedly egalitarian spaces.

Shafak's use of space also contributes to the intersectional reading of the novel. Istanbul, with its historical layers and ideological contradictions, serves as both a setting and a symbol. It represents the confluence of civilizations, faiths, and identities. The city's architecture—mosques adjacent to nightclubs, traditional homes near modern high-rises—mirrors the fragmented identities of its inhabitants. For Peri, Istanbul is not merely home but a terrain of constant negotiation. Oxford, on the other hand, symbolizes the promise of intellectual liberation but also the burden of cultural translation. Peri finds herself alienated not just from her peers but from herself, caught in the dissonance between who she is and who she is expected to be.

One of the most poignant aspects of the novel is its treatment of silence and voice. Peri's reluctance to speak—especially during moments of conflict—functions as both a personal trait and a metaphor for the silencing of women in patriarchal societies. Her trauma, culminating in her withdrawal from academia and public life, underscores how the intersection of gendered expectations and cultural conservatism can lead to psychic fragmentation. Shafak writes, "There were words stuck in her

throat like fish bones. She couldn't cough them up, nor swallow them down." This visceral image encapsulates the suffocating effect of intersecting oppressions on female expression.

While Mona and Shirin represent more outspoken modes of resistance, Peri's struggle is internal, psychological, and in many ways more reflective of the average woman's experience. Her silence is not passivity but a form of muted resilience, a coping mechanism in a world that constantly demands conformity. It is only toward the end of the novel, during a dramatic confrontation at a dinner party in Istanbul, that Peri begins to reclaim her voice. This act is symbolic of a broader awakening—a realization that identity need not be singular or fixed, and that navigating multiplicity is itself a form of agency.

The motif of motherhood also offers critical insights into the intersection of gender, religion, and culture. Selma's religiosity is both a source of moral structure and repression. Her desire to control Peri's choices is rooted not in malice but in a culturally inherited fear that deviation from traditional roles will result in social ruin. Shafak portrays this maternal anxiety with empathy, illustrating how patriarchal values are often transmitted through women, not because they are oppressors but because they, too, are products of a system that equates female virtue with obedience and sacrifice. At the same time, Peri's experience as a mother to her daughter, Deniz, marks a turning point. It is through this maternal role that she begins to reflect critically on her upbringing and the narratives imposed upon her. "She didn't want her daughter to inherit her confusion," Peri thinks, signaling a desire to break the intergenerational cycle of silence and repression.

Shafak's narrative strategy—moving between past and present, memory and reality—emphasizes the cumulative nature of intersectional identity. The reader is invited to piece together Peri's fragmented self through flashbacks, mirroring the psychological process of identity formation. This structure also reflects the non-linear nature of intersectional oppression, where past experiences, cultural scripts, and social expectations coalesce in unpredictable ways. Importantly, the novel does not offer a resolution in the conventional sense. Peri does not emerge with a clear ideological stance but with a deeper understanding of the complexity of her position. This ambiguity is crucial, as it resists the simplistic binaries that often characterize discourses on Muslim womanhood—devout versus secular, empowered versus oppressed, East versus West.

Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* masterfully explores the intricacies of identity and self-assertion within the polarized realms of East and West, tradition and modernity. The characters, particularly the three women at the heart of the novel—Peri, Mona, and Shirin—embody the tensions and reconciliations that emerge from these cultural dichotomies. The narrative functions as an intricate meditation on how individuals, especially women, negotiate competing ideological demands and cultural expectations while striving to exercise agency within the social frameworks that seek to define them.

Peri, the novel's central protagonist, exemplifies the internal struggle inherent in being caught between seemingly irreconcilable worlds. Her upbringing in Istanbul is marked by a profound conflict between her secular, atheistic father and her devout, conservative mother. This duality instills in Peri a persistent sense of confusion, a spiritual and cultural ambivalence that she carries into adulthood. Her navigation

between East and West is not merely geographic but also deeply psychological. When Peri moves to Oxford, she is exposed to liberal ideologies and secular academic discourse that contrast sharply with the religious conservatism of her Turkish background. Yet, instead of offering clarity, these experiences further complicate her identity, reflecting the lived reality of many women who straddle multiple cultural paradigms.

The tension between tradition and modernity in Peri's life is illustrated vividly in her interactions with Professor Azur. Azur represents a radical, modernist perspective that challenges religious orthodoxy and conventional belief systems. Through her engagement with Azur's teachings, Peri attempts to reconcile her spiritual uncertainty with intellectual curiosity. However, this relationship ultimately becomes a site of disillusionment, underscoring the limitations of relying solely on Western frameworks to resolve culturally rooted dilemmas. The novel suggests that Western modernity, while offering certain freedoms, can also replicate its own forms of rigidity and exclusion, especially when it disregards the emotional and spiritual complexities of those from non-Western contexts.

Mona, the "Believer," offers a contrasting form of agency, one that refuses the binary opposition between religion and modernity. A devout Muslim and outspoken feminist, Mona wears the hijab by choice, asserting that faith and autonomy are not mutually exclusive. Her character disrupts Western stereotypes of the veiled Muslim woman as oppressed and submissive. Instead, Mona reclaims religious identity as a source of empowerment. Her activism and vocal stance against Islamophobia highlight how agency can be articulated through resistance rather than assimilation. She represents a mode of navigation that does not require abandoning tradition but

instead reinterprets it to suit personal convictions. Mona's agency is proactive and political, grounded in her capacity to challenge both Western liberalism's assumptions and Eastern patriarchy's restrictions.

Shirin, the "Sinner," represents yet another axis in this cultural triangulation. As an Iranian-born, British-educated academic, she embraces secularism and sexual liberation, rejecting religious doctrine and traditional gender roles. Shirin's rejection of religion and open critique of patriarchy position her as a product of Western modernity. However, her identity is still shaped by her cultural heritage, and she carries the burden of being perceived through orientalist lenses in academic and social settings. Her assertiveness stems from a conscious effort to define herself outside of the expectations imposed by both her native and adopted cultures. Unlike Peri, Shirin exhibits a stable self-concept, but her estrangement from her roots also suggests that agency gained through total detachment may come at the cost of cultural belonging.

The interplay among these three women reveals that agency is not a fixed trait but a fluid process, shaped by intersecting socio-cultural forces and personal choices. Their dialogues, disagreements, and mutual reflections bring to light the multiplicity of ways in which women assert themselves within and against dominant narratives. Their experiences emphasize that there is no singular path to empowerment; instead, it is forged through continuous negotiation, compromise, and sometimes contradiction.

The Oxford years serve as a microcosm of larger global debates, with the university campus symbolizing a battleground for competing ideologies. Peri, Mona , and Shirin often find themselves confronting not only external judgments but also internal dilemmas about loyalty, authenticity, and identity. In one revealing moment,

Mona defends her choice to wear the hijab during a heated classroom discussion, stating, “Feminism doesn’t belong to the West. It’s not exclusive. It can wear a headscarf, too.” This assertion encapsulates the novel’s challenge to monolithic conceptions of feminism and underscores the pluralistic dimensions of female agency.

Shafak's portrayal of Istanbul also reinforces this thematic inquiry. The city itself is a luminal space—bridging Europe and Asia, past and present, sacred and secular. Istanbul mirrors Peri’s internal dissonance and provides a backdrop where tradition and modernity coexist in a state of tension and transformation. The city’s contradictions are embodied in Peri’s memories and choices, from her mother’s superstitions to her father’s skepticism, and from the conservative expectations placed upon her to the liberal freedoms she briefly experiences abroad. Peri’s life becomes an echo of Istanbul’s fragmented yet resilient identity.

Moreover, the novel critiques the binary thinking that often informs cultural and political discourse. Shafak resists reducing her characters to representatives of singular ideologies. Instead, she crafts multi-dimensional individuals whose identities are shaped by an array of factors—religion, class, nationality, education, and gender. This complexity challenges the East/West and tradition/modernity binaries by illustrating how real lives unfold in the gray spaces in between. For instance, Peri’s struggle with faith is not merely about belief versus atheism but involves deeper questions of spiritual longing, familial loyalty, and existential anxiety.

One of the novel’s central insights is that navigating these dichotomies involves not only outward resistance but also inward reconciliation. Peri’s ultimate confrontation with her past, symbolized by her return to Istanbul and the opening of her long-suppressed memories, signifies a reclaiming of her narrative. Although her

journey is fraught with ambiguity, it is precisely this ambiguity that enables her to redefine her sense of self. As she reflects near the end of the novel, “There were no straight answers, only infinite questions.” This line resonates with the idea that agency is not about achieving absolute clarity but about embracing complexity and exercising choice within it.

In addition to these primary characters, Shafak’s broader depiction of female experiences within Turkish society further illustrates how women navigate entrenched cultural expectations. Peripheral female figures, such as Peri’s mother, exhibit forms of agency that are often overlooked—resistance through preservation of tradition, endurance, or quiet defiance. Though less visible, these acts are equally significant in challenging hegemonic structures and reshaping gender roles within traditional contexts.

The narrative’s temporal structure also underscores the ongoing negotiation of identity. By moving between past and present, Shafak highlights the enduring impact of formative experiences and the non-linear nature of personal transformation. The fragmented chronology mirrors the fragmented identities of the characters, who are continually reshaped by their encounters with new ideas, people, and environments. This temporal fluidity reinforces the notion that agency is not a singular act but a cumulative process, often realized through reflection and reevaluation.

Ultimately, *Three Daughters of Eve* underscores the multiplicity and adaptability of female agency in the face of cultural dichotomies. The novel does not offer a singular model of liberation or empowerment but instead presents a spectrum of possibilities, each with its own challenges and implications. Whether through spiritual inquiry, political activism, or intellectual dissent, the female characters

navigate their circumstances with a consciousness that is both critical and creative. Their journeys remind readers that cultural binaries are not insurmountable walls but rather shifting boundaries that can be questioned, crossed, and redefined.

In presenting this nuanced tableau, Shafak contributes to a broader conversation about the global dimensions of womanhood and the localized expressions of autonomy. By foregrounding the lived realities of women who operate within—and across—divergent cultural frameworks, the novel invites a reconsideration of how agency is conceived, practiced, and narrated. It offers a compelling testament to the resilience of those who inhabit in-between spaces, constantly negotiating the terms of their own selfhood in the face of overlapping histories, ideologies, and expectations.

Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* intricately portrays the complexities of identity formation in the lives of Muslim women navigating faith, gender expectations, cultural dissonance, and societal scrutiny. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a profound analytical lens through which to explore the novel's female characters and their experiences, offering a framework that captures the multiplicity of social categories—gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and class—that intersect and shape their realities. By situating the characters within this intersectional matrix, readers gain a deeper understanding of how these women's identities are not monolithic but are instead constructed at the crossroads of various systems of power and discrimination.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw in 1989, emphasizes that individuals experience oppression or privilege in multifaceted ways based on the simultaneous influence of different aspects of identity. The theory was born out of the

realization that traditional feminist and anti-racist discourses often failed to capture the experiences of women of color, particularly Black women, whose realities could not be fully explained by analyses that focused on gender or race in isolation. Crenshaw argued that these overlapping identities produce distinct social dynamics that cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak's characters—especially Peri, Mona, and Shirin—experience marginalization and empowerment not through singular identity categories but through their intersection. Each of these women stands at the nexus of converging social and ideological forces that influence how they are perceived, how they perceive themselves, and how they act in response to both.

Peri's character is emblematic of intersectional complexity. She is neither wholly religious nor entirely secular, neither Eastern nor Western, neither submissive nor rebellious. Instead, she occupies a fluid identity space, shaped by her Turkish heritage, her elite socio-economic status, her gender, and her spiritual confusion. Her internal turmoil reflects the contradictions inherent in being a woman straddling multiple ideological borders. Born to a devout Muslim mother and an avowedly atheist father, Peri is forced to negotiate two competing moral universes within her own household. Crenshaw's framework allows us to see how Peri's identity is not simply about religion or gender alone, but about the way these categories intersect with her class background and national context. As a woman of privilege in Istanbul, she is granted access to education and social mobility, yet these privileges are not sufficient to shield her from the internalized anxieties of religious ambivalence and the cultural expectations imposed on her as a Turkish woman. She is not oppressed in a traditional sense, yet she is constrained by the ideological fragmentation of the environments she inhabits.

Her journey to Oxford introduces additional intersectional dynamics. In the West, Peri is exoticized as a foreign woman—Muslim, Turkish, and ambiguously religious. The label of "the confused" assigned to her by her fellow students and friends becomes both a reflection of her internal conflict and a social imposition based on her perceived "in-betweenness." At Oxford, she is not seen simply as a woman or a student but as a representative of an imagined Eastern otherness. The intersection of national origin, gender, and religion renders her doubly alienated—never fully belonging to either the secular intellectual elite of Oxford or the traditionalist values of her upbringing. In this context, intersectionality elucidates how Peri's "confusion" is not merely a personal crisis but a socially constructed identity produced by overlapping cultural expectations and the pressures of assimilation.

Mona, in contrast, represents a more assertive articulation of intersectional agency. As an American Muslim who wears the hijab by choice and identifies as a feminist, Mona defies the simplistic binaries of East versus West, religious versus secular, and submissive versus empowered. Crenshaw's theory is especially applicable to Mona's character because it provides the vocabulary to understand her refusal to compartmentalize her identity. Mona's experiences of marginalization are shaped by both Islamophobia in Western societies and patriarchal expectations within Muslim communities. Her activism is a response to this intersectional discrimination. In one powerful moment, she remarks, "They think I am either brainwashed or rebelling against my father. As if I can't have chosen this myself." This statement underscores the dual oppression she faces: from Western liberal societies that assume Muslim women cannot be agents of their own choices, and from conservative traditions that seek to control female behavior.

Intersectionality allows us to appreciate how Mona's hijab becomes a site of resistance rather than oppression. Her veil is not a symbol of submission but an assertion of religious identity, political defiance, and personal conviction. Without the lens of intersectionality, Mona might be misread as a contradiction—how can a feminist wear a headscarf?—but Crenshaw's theory reveals that this supposed contradiction is in fact a rich intersection of identities that coexist and empower one another. Mona's feminism is informed by her faith and her faith is expressed through feminist activism. Her character offers a powerful illustration of how intersecting identities can be sources of strength and resistance rather than just vulnerability.

Shirin, the "Sinner," embodies yet another intersectional dimension. As a secular Iranian academic living in Britain, Shirin's identity is shaped by gender, cultural displacement, and ideological rebellion. Her decision to reject religion and embrace Western liberalism is not simply a matter of personal belief but a reaction to the oppressive structures she has experienced in her native culture. Her sexual freedom and intellectual outspokenness mark her as a transgressive figure both in Western academia and among conservative diasporic communities. Intersectionality helps unpack the ways in which Shirin navigates marginality not just as a woman, but as an immigrant, a non-white intellectual, and a critic of Islam. Her defiance is not always met with acceptance; she is viewed with suspicion in both East and West. While she fits comfortably into secular academic discourse, she is often bothered by Western peers who exoticize her background or expect her to conform to orientalist stereotypes. Intersectionality enables a recognition of this layered alienation—Shirin is never quite "enough" for any single group because her identity refuses to be reduced to one category.

These three women, often referred to as the "Sinner, the Believer, and the Confused," are not simply archetypes but dynamic individuals whose lives are shaped by the intersecting forces of religion, gender, race, class, nationality, and personal ideology. Crenshaw's theory provides a vital tool for deconstructing these overlapping systems, enabling a deeper understanding of how their experiences cannot be adequately captured through singular frameworks. For example, traditional feminist critiques that focus solely on patriarchy may miss the role of religion or ethnicity in shaping a woman's experience, just as religious analyses may ignore the impact of gender and class hierarchies. By using intersectionality as a critical lens, readers can discern how these forces interact to produce specific forms of privilege and oppression that differ from character to character.

Additionally, Shafak's portrayal of Istanbul and Oxford as contrasting yet interconnected spaces further reflects the intersectional landscapes the characters traverse. Istanbul, with its blend of modernity and tradition, symbolizes the coexistence of competing ideologies within a single cultural space. Oxford, often idealized as a beacon of Western enlightenment, is revealed to be just as capable of imposing normative expectations and exclusions. These environments are not neutral backdrops but active components in shaping how identity is experienced and enacted. Crenshaw's framework helps to show that spaces, like identities, are not monolithic—they carry their own hierarchies, expectations, and power dynamics that interact with the individual's social location.

Crenshaw's theory also highlights the structural forces at play in the characters' lives. Peri's psychological breakdown, Mona's activism, and Shirin's academic critiques are all responses to systemic pressures rather than purely

individual choices. For instance, Peri's sense of dislocation is exacerbated by the clash of public discourses—religious dogma, secular rationalism, and nationalistic ideologies—that compete for dominance in Turkey and abroad. Mona's feminism is shaped by her need to respond to multiple forms of exclusion, while Shirin's detachment from her roots stems from her resistance to ideological impositions that reduce her to a cultural stereotype. Intersectionality urges us to consider how these personal stories are embedded within broader social structures, legal systems, and cultural narratives that frame and limit the options available to women.

Even the characters' silences and compromises take on new meaning when analyzed through an intersectional lens. Peri's hesitation to speak out, her ambivalence about her relationship with Professor Azur, and her ultimate decision to suppress painful memories for years are not simply signs of personal weakness or confusion. They are the result of navigating overlapping identities in environments that do not fully accommodate difference. Intersectionality does not judge these actions but seeks to understand them in context—highlighting how structural constraints, cultural expectations, and internalized anxieties intersect to shape decision-making.

Shafak's broader message in the novel aligns with Crenshaw's central insight: identities are multifaceted, and so are systems of oppression and empowerment. There is no singular womanhood, no universal feminism, and no absolute spiritual truth that can encapsulate the experiences of all. What *Three Daughters of Eve* offers through its nuanced characters and settings is a testament to the richness of intersectional identity—a recognition that the most authentic understanding of self comes not from

choosing one side of a binary, but from embracing the complexity of multiple influences.

CHAPTER NO 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has undertaken a critical exploration of Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* through the theoretical framework of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality. By delving into the multidimensional experiences of Shafak's female characters, the study has illuminated how gender, religion, culture, and class intersect to shape their identities and decisions within a highly polarized and ideologically charged society. The central objective has been to understand how intersectionality functions not only as a theoretical tool but also as a practical lens through which we can critically engage with the layered realities of women in contemporary Muslim contexts.

Throughout the analysis, it became evident that Shafak constructs a narrative space where ideological dichotomies—such as East versus West, secularism versus religiosity, and modernity versus tradition—are not merely abstract cultural debates but are experienced personally and intimately by her characters. The novel's protagonist, Peri, emerges as a powerful representation of this intersectional tension. Torn between a secular, liberal father and a devoutly religious mother, Peri embodies the struggle of negotiating conflicting cultural and spiritual inheritances. Her internal confusion is not only a product of these binaries but also a response to the societal expectations that seek to impose coherence on identities that are, by nature, multifaceted.

The first analytical inquiry focused on how *Three Daughters of Eve* depicts the intersection of gender, religion, and culture. The findings reveal that Shafak uses her female characters as narrative vehicles to interrogate and expose the social,

religious, and gendered structures that govern women's lives. Each of the three daughters—Mona, Shirin, and Peri—symbolizes a different modality of womanhood, shaped by varying degrees of religious devotion, cultural background, and socio-political positioning. Mona, the veiled Muslim feminist, challenges Western stereotypes about Muslim women by asserting her religious identity alongside her academic and social activism. Shirin, the atheist academic, represents a defiance against cultural orthodoxy and patriarchal norms. Peri, who occupies the middle ground, highlights the psychological burden of ideological ambivalence. Together, these characters offer a composite portrait of how identity is negotiated across intersecting systems of meaning and control.

The second question addressed how the characters navigate and assert agency within the cultural dichotomies of East and West, tradition and modernity. The analysis found that Shafak does not present these dichotomies as fixed or oppositional but rather as fluid and often overlapping. The novel critiques the simplistic binary logic that pits modernity against tradition or the East against the West. Instead, it portrays characters who oscillate between these poles, refusing to be reduced to any single ideological label. For instance, Mona's decision to wear the hijab in the West becomes an act of both cultural preservation and political resistance. Shirin's secular lifestyle, while seemingly liberated, is still shaped by the traumas and expectations imposed by her Iranian background. Peri, in her confusion, illustrates the difficulties of forming a stable sense of self when constantly pulled by competing ideologies. Agency in *Three Daughters of E*ve is therefore not about complete autonomy or emancipation but about finding room to maneuver within structures of constraint.

The third question examined the utility of *intersectionality* in enhancing our understanding of character development and thematic construction. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory, originally developed to critique the marginalization of Black women in feminist and legal discourses, proves to be a powerful tool for literary analysis in this context. It enables a reading that goes beyond single-axis identity categories, revealing how the entanglement of religion, gender, class, and culture operates in the lives of Shafak's characters. Intersectionality brings to the fore the invisibilized dimensions of oppression—such as the way class privilege affords Peri educational opportunities that Mona and Shirin may not have, or how Mona's religious attire subjects her to both Western Islamophobia and Eastern patriarchal condescension. This layered understanding not only enriches character interpretation but also brings to light the broader socio-political commentary embedded in the narrative.

Moreover, the application of intersectionality underscores how *Three Daughters of Eve* functions as a counter-discursive text that challenges dominant narratives surrounding Muslim womanhood. By offering diverse representations of female subjectivity, Shafak resists the homogenizing tendencies of both Western liberal feminism and traditional patriarchal structures. The novel does not attempt to offer a definitive model of emancipation but instead opens up a dialogic space where multiple voices and experiences coexist and contend. This polytonality is itself a form of resistance against the epistemic violence that seeks to erase complexity in favor of easily digestible categories.

The study also revealed how the concept of identity in Shafak's novel is inherently unstable and performative. Characters are not born into fixed identities but

are constantly reconfiguring themselves in response to external pressures and internal crises. Intersectionality allows us to see this reconfiguration not as failure or confusion but as a realistic and necessary adaptation to a world that is itself fragmented and contradictory. The novel, through its narrative form and character arcs, affirms that ambiguity and hybridity are not signs of weakness but of survival and resistance.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that intersectionality offers a rich and nuanced framework for analyzing *Three Daughters of Eve*. It enables a deeper engagement with the text by accounting for the complex interplay of multiple social forces that shape identity and agency. Through its multi-layered characters and ideological tensions, the novel mirrors the lived realities of many women who find themselves caught between competing worlds. The findings of this research suggest that future literary studies—especially those engaging with texts from the Global South—would benefit from similarly intersectional approaches that honor the intricacy of human experience.

As global societies continue to grapple with rising polarization, cultural essentialism, and gendered violence, the insights offered by intersectional readings of literature become all the more urgent. Shafak's novel stands as a testament to the power of fiction to articulate, interrogate, and transcend the binaries that dominate contemporary discourse. By centering the voices and experiences of women at the margins, *Three Daughters of Eve* invites readers to reconsider not only what it means to belong, believe, and become—but also how literature can serve as a medium for critical reflection and transformative empathy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Drawing upon the insights gathered in this study, several important recommendations are proposed for future academic inquiry and literary analysis. Firstly, it is imperative that future research concerning Muslim female protagonists transcends simplistic dualisms and adopts more layered, intersectional frameworks. Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* illustrates the intricate interplay of identity within a world marked by cultural fragmentation and ideological conflict. Scholars are encouraged to further investigate how intersectionality can be employed to analyze literature arising from postcolonial and diasporic traditions, particularly in narratives featuring culturally hybrid women navigating conflicting norms and values.

Secondly, this research underscores the value of interpreting religious and cultural structures as interconnected forces that significantly influence women's autonomy. Future studies may benefit from exploring how intersectionality interacts with other theoretical lenses—such as postcolonial feminism, queer theory, or decolonial perspectives—to produce even more nuanced understandings of gender identity and social positioning. This approach could be applied not only to Shafak's broader literary corpus but also to other contemporary authors who interrogate themes of faith, displacement, and personal liberation.

Lastly, considering the ideological divisions depicted in the novel, educators, critics, and curriculum developers are urged to engage fiction as a dynamic platform for cultivating critical consciousness and empathy. Implementing intersectional analyses in literature courses can promote a deeper awareness of religious, gendered, and cultural diversity while challenging essentialist representations. In this way, *Three Daughters of Eve* may serve not only as a compelling work of fiction but also as a

valuable educational resource for encouraging inclusive and reflective dialogue on identity, power, and social belonging.

WORKS CITED:

Ahmed, Sarah, and Leila Bennani. “Female Friendship and Solidarity in Three Daughters of Eve.” Women’s Studies Quarterly, vol. 50, no. 3–4, 2022, pp. 90–105.

Akram, Aisha, and Muhammad Usama Siddique. “Construction of Womanhood, Gender-Based Violence and Patriarchal Intersections in Elif Shafak’s ‘Three Daughters of Eve’: A Feminist-Psychoanalytical Approach.” International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, vol. 6, no. 2, 2021, pp. 271–276.

Al-Zahrani, Shuaa S., and Laila M. Al-Sharqi. “Prismatic Identities or Authentic Selves? Elif Shafak’s Three Daughters of Eve: A Perspective of Intersectional Feminism.” International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies, vol. 12, no. 1, 2023, pp. 45–56.

Balvantbhai, Varde Hirenkumar. “Elif Shafak’s Three Daughters of Eve: Allegory of Identities and Authentic Selves.” European Academic Research, vol. 8, no. 5, 2021, pp. 2452–2465.

Butler, Judith. ender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge, 1990.

Collins, Patricia Hill. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. Routledge, 2000.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” University of Chicago Legal Forum, vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139–167.

Rehman, Naveed ur, Manaf Ali Shah, and Aziz Ullah Khan. “Eve Between East and West: A Psychoanalytical Study of Elif Shafak’s Three Daughters of Eve.” Journal of Contemporary Poetics, vol. 1, no. 2, 2022, pp. 101–114.

Shafak, Elif. Three Daughters of Eve. Penguin Books, 2017.

Tahir, Rabieah, Iqra Jabeen, and Ayesha Izhar Chaudhri. “Existential Threads in Shafak’s ‘Three Daughters of Eve’: A Critical Reading.” International Journal of English and Education, vol. 10, no. 3, 2021, pp. 156–164.

Yildirim, Mustafa, and Ayşe Demir. “Negotiating Diaspora and Belonging in Three Daughters of Eve.” Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, vol. 4, no. 1, 2022, pp. 88–103.